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FULL ARTIST TESTIMONIAL, 01.3.2016

Artist name: Andrew Gryf Paterson

Nationality/nationalities: Scottish, UK

Countries and contexts you mainly work and exhibit in: Finland, Latvia

Working with digital aesthetics/tools/methods since (year): 1997

How would you briefly describe your artistic practice and aesthetic orientation within contemporary art (main themes / materials / aesthetics / method / other)?

My artistic practice is strongly process-orientated. I often like to say the process involves “out-comes and -goings” to emphasize that what might be presented as results are more often just the marks and traces in the process of development.

What has been my material and themes has changed a lot over the years. My multi-disciplinary learning environments maybe elaborate how: I have an education in fine art printmaking, and afterwards I self-taught myself digital imaging and edit skills, experimenting briefly with mixing these two things together in 1998. During a first flourishing period of creative writing, also I made a conversion Masters of Science in computer-graphical technologies, specialized in virtual environments, where I combined spoken word and virtual audio environments. I applied then, and later, metaphors and designs of stratigraphical data structures, borrowing from archaeological practices and geological thinking. Layers and layers building up over time, sometimes eroding and folding over, repeating patterns. What is left behind as social, digital, material and ephemeral residue of 'being t/here' has been a consistent concern.

For the past 12 years or so, I have been associated with—and active among—the 'media arts' scene of North Eastern Europe. So to summarize, I started with the very material and physical workshop processes, and then the increasingly immaterial and ephemeral ones. I increasingly focused on social (human) interactions. I have also learned from the community arts context in late '90s UK, socially-engaged arts (or whats now often called social practice) from the UK, USA and Nordic countries in the '00s, and then within the Northern European cultural and media activism(s) that has included open-source culture, network arts (from 2003-), sustainability issues, art+ecology, environmental issues, art+science, and bioarts (2009-). Due to these influences, I have felt closest to the creative practices that have an aesthetic outside the mainstream gallery, Kunsthalle and contemporary art centre spaces.. Those which emerge and are presented in temporary and often self-institutionalizing festival gatherings, associational spaces, public and urban spaces in city or small-town environments, as well as what you might call natureculture spaces (simply put, 'out in the Nature', recognizing it is not that simple). Most recently, in the last 5 years or so, practices of everyday life, connecting cultural heritage and traditions, with knowledge-sharing, peer-learning/production, appropriate networking—as well as giving and taking care—have become priorities for me. The result of this combination of approaches means that nowadays I am putting the aesthetics of living a good, ethical, sustainable and appropriate life well before those of media, art or technology.

To conclude, the answer to this question is that my practice(s) and aesthetics lie in hybridity, communications, organization and network arts: the ability to bring together and involve people in creative, collaborative exploration, developing temporary communities, gathering unexpected elements and components as new spaces of/for everyday and sustainable cultural activity in relation to life.

How is the digital influencing your work?

From 1998 onwards it was so that 'the digital' influenced my work in the use of software tools, media disk storage, organizing principles, theories to read, or platforms online to re-present and narrate my activity, process or work. Indeed the digital completely enabled, empowered and facilitated collaboration and the communities of association around these aspects, both locally where I lived and resided since more or less (i.e. Scotland, England, Germany, Finland, Latvia, USA), but also internationally, spreading me around physically in related travels, and also multiplying or thinning the 'me' or 'I' out attention-wise. It is difficult or indeed impossible to put that gene back in the bottle, as I wish to collaborate with others on almost all work processes.

From 2008-2012, I also had the privilege to lecture and facilitate Finnish polytechnic students in Helsinki about 'Digital Media Culture' (in English language). Admittedly it is a very broad topic, and I was (luckily) given a rather free hand at introducing, curating and linking to various aspects and examples of digitality. I acknowledged that the digital had infiltrated so many aspects of life, at all different levels – in the physical atomic and molecular structures, within our socio-organizational and economic structures, in work and play, in our desires and fantasies of love, security and sex – that it was not really possible for one person to select and sample what was a new or interesting trend or practice, never mind how to pedagogically work with that range from one source. Furthermore, the position of being an expert was increasingly redundant. We all use mostly the same source of inspiration: peer-based or specialist reference, swapping or exchange networks, file-sharing and messaging, the Internet. But also we trust the 'hands-on', or our own eyes and ears, in fact, 'body-on' experience, with peer- and practice- based learning, and experiments of the latest new device, source, service and so on.

Furthermore, the over-abundance and proliferation of technology in the wealthy Nordic context, as well as experience of prototyping new media or digital imaginaries—in particular mobile and locative media—it led me deeper into the local 'new media culture' and 'art+science' Pixelache Helsinki, Finnish Bioart Society, and RIXC Riga communities (including their related local, regional and international networks). This was a very enriching experience in all different directions. However, in the process, I also witnessed several churns of those early artist-led experiments becoming mainstream practice by people other than artists, innovative designers or early-adopters.. In-other-words, experiments developed further by start-up enterprises, university research groups, and eventually corporate entities getting fully—and sometimes lucratively—involved in the digital influences which I was keenly interested in exploring previously.

This digital industrial and capitalizing process encouraged me to go further and further with associative, and consciously non-profit, peer-to-peer, activist and Commons-oriented processes. This included developing increasingly less-mediated activity for and with my peers. I was certainly one of the ones in our network who was leaning more towards the Ache than the Pixel. From that point onwards, around 2009, I decided to focus on alternative economy cultures, intangible cultural heritage subjects, cooperativism, growing food and foraging wild plants and fungi—for example about plant and berries—and presence-based, socially-orientated cultural events such as with the 'Clip Kino'

project. Through-out, I saw relationships and overlaps with online network cultural practices and knowledge-sharing, but I was interested in how it manifested in relation to our corporeal material and unmediated realities, at physical not virtual sites. Hence, I got more and more involved in direct engagement with people, places, plant-life, natureculture, food.. Applying D.I.Y. → D.I.W.O. (do it with others), peer-to-peer, sharing is caring, Commons, CopyLove offline as much as possible. However the digital communications streams, screens and devices still influence way too much on my attention. The pace of exchange still needs to be adjusted, slowed down. To something appropriate, careful and thoughtful. Choosing to nourish in particular, consciously, outside of the machine and it's human-designed algorithms.

With departure in reference to your work, can you point at how this 'digital influence' might be affecting the contemporary art scene in the Nordic region (and internationally)?

As I have mentioned the 'digital influence' has encouraged me to get involved in subjects, scenes and activities which are definitely practice-wise outwith the mainstream contemporary art scene of the Nordic region, at least if we speak of galleries, museums and exhibition spaces presenting solely artefacts. But I do believe I fit well into a branch of the Nordic scene that is orientated to social and participatory practices, which can for example spread from the youth to refugee centre in a series of public events; See opportunity for inviting others into getting involved on public space online or offline; Or material and ingested engagements with ecological and everyday life subjects, such as food and foraging.. And that these all produce knowledge, media artefacts, and documentations to share afterwards in publications, books, PDFs and posts online.

Recognizing that such cultural production activities in the Nordic (and Baltic) region are largely grant-dependent, largely funded by public cultural and educational funds, or private foundations, rather than other forms of entrepreneurial activities, there are few more notes of affect I can add here. The dominant role of social media, and in particular those that promote events, gatherings and festivals which actually gather people together is significant and pervasive. It is arguably difficult to do any cultural production without the backing of 'freemium' social media services to help promote, attend-to, and amplify what is going on in a noisy and info-rich, multi-lingual and post-media Nordic communication environment. We are more-or-less educated—and largely savvy enough—to know that by not paying, we are the product out of which money is made for the (mostly) corporate multi-national company which runs the platform. We are conforming to the interactive norms and values dictated from elsewhere, mostly the United States. It is, hence, a digital pragmatism that can be valued, even in the lands of open-source pioneers, such as Finland and Sweden are. We are no longer, with a small number of exceptions, able to both reach out to a diverse audience beyond the contemporary art scenes *and* design the interface, algorithms of value of the digital platform that promote and information exchange to the 'dear public'. So not only do we struggle to trust the platforms, their sustainability socially and economically, and the ethics inscribed in their algorithms and interfaces; but we also try our best to trust that those individuals involved, who click-but-dont-show, are also suffering. Suffering from attention- or focus- deficit or info-overload.

The potential audience of culture (in whichever form) is in the now and future also susceptible to the same exhaustion and digital burnout that the artists, cultural producers and organizers can and have faced. The increasing ache with the pixels that I elaborated above. Thankfully in the Nordic context there is a lot of space, in communications and in natureculture to assist. The lands and the skies are broad, at least on the Fenno-Scandinavian peninsulas. Just who is going to still have access to this luxury in the future I ask?

How do you consider that the themes or questions in your artwork may reflect that you work in or come from a Nordic context (geographical / cultural / societal / political)?

I have been and still am an immigrant and guest in and among the Nordic and Baltic peoples. However I acknowledge that I have now been based in Helsinki, Finland, for now a year or so, longer than my childhood-memory home in the central Scottish rural countryside, as well as Glasgow, my second-longest known place. I can and do say that I come originally from Scotland, but now I am coming from Helsinki and the Baltic Sea region. Admittedly I have been visiting Latvia, and by transit at least Estonia, for almost as long a time. Due to this, I have even re-inscribed a locative group-identity for myself.. I am a Baltic-Scot. I like to think I know a few others, now and in the historical past. This self-allocation of identity I am familiar with from my own particular cultural identity background that straddles an internationally-networked, solidly European if also that from an island-er, left-field, autonomous-spirited, and outward-minded orientation, with a peripheral Northern perspective. Not so dissimilar from a Nordic one.

My early research into modern identity politics, under the title 'Raising Flags of Difference' of my BA(Hons) degree thesis of 1996-1997 was an early historical and political guide. My original inspiration and motivation for visiting Finland for the first time in the year afterwards, thanks to a Peter Kirk Memorial Scholarship in 1998, was applied with the hope to visit the crossroads between East and West, and also visit a 'dream-centre' of Europe. After several months there I realized the interesting and specific axis of interest for me there was all gradients in-between an axis of Isolation—Integration, and the other, an axis of Nature—Technology. In some ways being an immigrant in NE Europe was not so hard, due to my very privileged entry-point of arriving and being a Scottish/UK-origin, well-educated doctoral candidate at the University of (applied) Art and Design Helsinki. Also in addition the open-mindedness and relatively-flat society of Finland, and Helsinki in particular, plus having key friends already placed well in the city, a mobile technology enthusiasm at it's local high-point, and by no means least, another generous scholarship in my bank-account (Leverhulme Study Abroad Studentship).. It meant that I had a ideal and smooth start or route towards being a *Stadilainen* (Helsinki-resident).

The rest of my artistic and research practice in the Nordic context since has arguably been an engagement with that reality, including when the social, economic and technological utopia has broken-down several times, with the accompanying challenges and difficulties, new eases and obstacles, in the most appropriate way possible. I recognize in the current, contemporary context the way into Nordic-Baltic culture and society is not as easy as it was for me then.. Due to economic recession, no longer for the privileged Western ones anymore, and certainly not for the less fortunate by birth, those from the Global South, especially Africa, Middle East and Central Asia.

Can you point at some ways in which the digital (tool, medium, aesthetics, theme) may influence how your work responds to a contemporary societal context?

The answer to this question is for me obvious, and I believe I have covered this ground already in earlier questions. At the danger of repeating myself, we really need to now give and take care, to other humans from all places, indigenous and native, immigrant and asylum-seeking.

We really need to now give and take care to our non-human companions in biodiversity, at various levels from microbial, cellular, organic and mineral matter, as well as the sentient species that can see and touch with our senses. If the digital can help us with that, brilliant! If not, lets be very critical and selective of the tools, mediums, aesthetics and themes we get involved in. We are in the age of breakdown of much that we have taken for granted in multiple fields at

the same time. I really do hope the contemporary Nordic-Baltic societal context, and it's resident artists, scientists, activists, producers and entrepreneurs (of all stripes) will be a leader in our new ways of doing, in what some are calling in English as 'The Great Turning' (towards survival) that will accompany the Great Unravelling. These will be interesting and challenging years and decades ahead, that we need to meet with courage and creativity in whatever ways we can.